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The Salary Survey in Perspective

Mary Frances Malone

Editor's Note: In honor of the centennial of library education in the United States, SLA asked Mary Frances (Hoban) Malone, assistant dean of the Graduate School of Communication at Fairfield University and former SLA manager of professional development, to write a brief summary on the history of the Salary Survey and the changes that have occurred in the survey over the past years. As manager of professional development, 1978 to 1983, Ms. Malone set up the continuing education program as it now exists, as well as produced the Salary Survey.

From its inception in 1967, the Salary Survey has provided an interesting and valuable tool for the profession and the membership. Over the years the survey has remained stable, that is the response rate has differed little from year to year and the percentage increase has risen steadily but uneventfully. Until 1983, the complete questionnaire and the updates covered the same areas each survey. In that year, the association expanded the questionnaire in the hope of attaining more complete salary information. They realized that supervisory experience, number of personnel, and job title play an important part in determining salary level. In addition, the type of institution information provided a more complete analysis of salary data. The more comprehensive breakdown of data is especially helpful as members enter into salary negotiation. It also aids wage and salary administrators who require organizational and geographic data.

Over a nine-year period, from 1976 to 1985, salaries in all percentile ranks nearly doubled. This indicates an economic growth in the profession comparable to educators and other service professions. The growth also parallels that of United States government services. While the salary survey growth is stable, the figures perhaps do not completely reflect the economic changes in the profession. One must remember that averaging figures over time tends to stabilize or level them. One needs to examine some highs and lows over the years to spot some facts about the profession.

For example, in 1985 on the lowest end of the scale men make eighteen percent more than women, while on the highest end of the scale men's salaries are twenty-seven percent higher. It would seem that the gap grows wider as people advance in the profession. This phenomenon of salary differentiation mirrors many other professions.

On the geographic front, the relative position of the East South Central region of the United States shows a significant change. In 1982 this region ranked fourth in salary rating while in 1985 its rank dropped to tenth, the bottom of the scale. The number of jobs in that area, or at least responses from the area, doubled. Thus perhaps the drop in relative positions reflects more of an entry-level

growth for the profession than a stagnating of salaries.

Another interesting point, when comparing figures over the years, is the age of respondents. Most service industries, such as teaching, have an abundance of personnel moving close to retirement. Figures for the special librarians, or at least the respondents to their surveys, indicate a slight growth in the 30 to 39 year olds. The so called "baby boomers" seem to be filling the ranks of information professionals in all industries.

Mobility, a characteristic of much of corporate America, seems less evident among special librarians. For the most part, the majority of respondents worked for one, and not more than two, employers. This has not necessarily improved their salary increases but it may indicate job satisfaction.

One reason salary trends appear so stable may relate to the types of organizations represented. A vast majority of respondents work in government, academic institutions, and non-profit organizations. Traditionally, drastic economic changes least affect these organizations.

Among all the other industries mentioned, the information brokers closely align with the rising trend of entrepreneurship. This group increased in number and ascended from the lowest rung of salary distribution by type of institution ranked in order of median salary to the top third of the group.

In summary, the salary survey provides a valued service to members, to the profession, and to the industries that employ information specialists. The lack of dramatic trends results primarily from the methodology used in these surveys. In balance, the survey makes not exciting, but valuable, research material.

1986 Salary Survey Update

In an effort to assist special librarians in salary negotiations, Special Libraries Association conducts an in-depth salary survey every three years. During intervening years the Association, using a random sampling technique, polls 25% of the membership to provide current salary information. The results present an overview of special librarians' salaries, as well as a measure of annual salary increases since the last survey.

The 1986 data update the overall national and regional salary data reported in the 1985 in-depth triennial salary survey report. While not as comprehensive as the 1985 survey report, the 1986 update indicates general national salary trends. Used in conjunction with the 1985 report, the 1986 information provides special librarians with guidelines for salary discussions.

During April–May 1986, a 25% sample of Members and Associate Members received the survey questionnaire.

Questionnaires Mailed	2,905
Questionnaires Returned	1,195 (41%)
Invalid for Computation	101
Useable Responses	1,094 (37.6%)

Table 1 reports the changes in mean and median salaries from April 1, 1985, to April 1, 1986, within nine U.S. census regions and Canada. The figures illustrate changes in dollar amounts and percentage increase or decrease.

The survey indicates an overall median salary increase in the United States of $2,300 from $26,500 in 1985 to $28,800 in 1986. This represents an 8.0% increase over last year. The overall mean salary reflects a $2,206 increase from $27,974 in 1985 to $30,180 in 1986—a 7.4% increase.

A median salary increase in Canada of $1,440 from $31,740 in 1985 to $33,180 in 1986 took place. This represents a 4.4% increase since last year. The overall mean salary reflects a $2,060 increase from $32,696 in 1985 to $34,756 in 1986—a 6.0% increase.

A comparison with past surveys indicates an increase of 13.2% in the median salary within the United States over the last three years. The median rose from $25,000 in 1983 to $28,800 in 1986. The 1986 data are reflective of a 12.3% increase in the mean salary for the United States from $26,489 in 1983 to $30,180 in 1986.

Table 1. 1986 Mean & Median Salaries by Census Region in Rank Order of % Change in Median from 1985 to 1986

Census Region	Median 1985	Median % of increase (or decrease)	Median 1986	Mean 1985	Mean %	Mean 1986
Canada*	31,740	4.4	33,180	32,696	6.0	34,756
Pacific	29,192	5.9	31,000	30,551	6.1	32,519
Middle Atlantic	28,000	11.2	31,500	30,322	9.3	33,418
South Atlantic	28,000	0.0	28,000	30,008	6.0	31,907
New England	26,200	12.5	29,937	27,451	10.5	30,649
East North Central	26,000	5.5	27,500	27,611	8.1	30,033
West South Central	26,000	8.4	28,371	27,180	7.1	29,240
Mountain	25,750	(6.5)	24,096	26,145	(3)	25,383
West North Central	24,600	18.0	30,000	25,979	15.7	30,812
East South Central	24,500	14.1	28,500	26,527	4.1	27,660
Overall United States	26,500	8.0	28,800	27,974	7.4	30,180

*Salaries reported in Canadian dollars. The exchange rate on April 1, 1985, was approximately Canadian $1.37 = United States $1.00. On April 1, 1986, the rate was Canadian $1.39 = United States $1.00.

Table 2. Salary Distribution by Census Region in Rank Order of 1986 Median

Census Region	Average Lowest 10%	25th Percentile	Median	75th Percentile	Average Highest 10%	Mean	No Respondents
Canada*	22,182	30,000	33,180	39,000	53,061	34,756	118
Middle Atlantic	19,132	26,000	31,500	37,958	58,214	33,418	310
Pacific	20,997	26,832	31,000	36,225	50,412	32,519	168
West North Central	17,776	25,000	30,000	35,000	49,368	30,812	46
New England	16,414	23,000	29,937	35,000	54,269	30,649	77
East South Central	16,350	19,419	28,500	31,000	50,000	27,660	11
West South Central	18,983	24,400	28,371	34,000	41,933	29,240	59
South Atlantic	17,312	24,000	28,000	38,000	57,533	31,907	110
East North Central	19,224	24,000	27,500	34,000	50,042	30,033	175
Mountain	17,625	21,715	24,096	29,500	32,375	25,383	20
Overall United States	18,201	23,818	28,800	34,520	49,349	30,180	976

*See Footnote to Table 1

Canadian survey comparison indicates an increase of 14.1% in median salary during the last three years, rising from $28,500 in 1983 to $33,180 in 1986. A 9.3% increase in the mean salary occurred; the mean rose from $31,553 in 1983 to $34,756 in 1986.

All regions sampled, except for the Mountain and South Atlantic regions, experienced a median salary increase. The increase ranged from 18.0% to 4.4%. The South Atlantic region experienced no increase and the Mountain region median decreased by 6.5% between 1985 and 1986.

All areas, except the Mountain region, experienced an increase in mean salary ranging from 15.7% to 4.1% above 1985 figures. The Mountain region experienced a 3.0% decrease in mean salary.

Table 2 lists the salary distribution in rank order of 1986 median salaries for Canada and nine United States census regions. In comparing rankings with the 1985 salary survey data, the three regions showing the greatest change are the West North Central region, which moved up from eight to three, the East South Central region, which moved up from nine to five, and the South Atlantic region, which moved down from two to seven. Canada and New England showed no change. The Mountain and East North Central regions moved down two positions while the Middle Atlantic region moved up two positions. The East North Central and South Atlantic regions moved down one position.

Table 3 lists salary distribution by four job titles: Manager, Assistant/Section Head, Librarian/Information Specialist, and Support Staff. The data are combined for the nine census regions and Canada. Managers' salaries ranged from $23,011 to $63,184 with a mean

Table 3. 1986 Salary Distribution by Job Title, United States & Canada Combined

Job Title	Average Lowest 10%	25th Percentile	Median	75th Percentile	Average Highest 10%	Mean	No Respondents
Manager	23,011	31,000	36,000	43,888	63,184	38,404	404
Assistant/ Section Head	21,820	26,712	30,617	35,125	44,455	31,122	128
Library/ Information Specialist	17,679	23,000	26,820	31,500	41,506	27,729	548
Support Staff	11,685	17,400	20,400	26,438	35,320	22,145	14

salary of $38,404. Assistant/Section Heads earned from $21,820 to $44,455, the mean was $31,122. Individuals holding the title Librarian/Information Specialist had salaries ranging from $17,679 to $41,506 with a mean of $27,729. Support staff salaries ranged from $11,685 to $35,320, the mean was $22,145.

A comparison of 1984 Salary Survey data indicates that median salaries at the managerial level rose from $33,000 to $36,000. This represents an 8.4% increase from April 1, 1984, to April 1, 1986. The mean salary in 1984 was $34,643 rising to $38,404 in 1986—a 10% increase. The median salary for Assistant/Section Heads increased from $26,780 in 1984 to $30,617 in 1986—a 12.6% increase. The corresponding mean salary increased 13.4% from $26,976 in 1984 to $31,122 in 1986. Librarian/Information Specialists' median salary rose 6.8% from $25,000 in 1984 to $26,820 in 1986. The mean increased 8.7% from $25,343 to $27,729. The median salary for support staff in 1986 was $20,400, a 6.9% increase from the 1984 report of $19,000. Mean salary also increased from $20,054 to $22,145—a 9.5% rise.

The 1986 Salary Survey attempted to define the number of respondents unemployed during the period April 1, 1985, to April 1, 1986. Of the 1,094 valid responses, 45 participants (4.1%) indicated unemployment during a portion of this period. Average length of unemployment was four months.